

Psychological Challenges and Coping Strategies of Unemployed Graduates in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated psychological challenges and coping strategies of unemployed graduates in Rivers State. Four research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 23,000 unemployed graduates who turned up for the aborted immigration recruitment examination at Liberation Stadium Elekahia, Port Harcourt on 15th March, 2014. A sample size of 400 was drawn from the population using accidental sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 22 item questionnaire based on 4 point Likert scale, developed by the researchers. The reliability coefficients of the instrument for the variables under study were 0.72 and 0.67 respectively. The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while independent t-test and one way ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance were used to test the null hypotheses. The findings reveal that; the mean ratings of self-concept in the two groups (male and female) differ slightly in favour of the female; low self-concept and anxiety constitute significant challenge to both male and female unemployed graduates. The study also revealed significant difference in the coping strategies employed by the male and female unemployed graduates. The male unemployed graduates cope better than their female counterparts. Based on the findings recommendations were made, among which was that vocational guidance counselors be posted to schools and made functional at all levels of education to enhance proper orientation of the students before they enter the labour market.

Keywords: Graduate, Unemployment, Self-Concept, Anxiety, Coping Strategies, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing rate of graduate unemployment in Rivers State and in Nigeria as a whole has become an issue of great concern to government and non-governmental organizations including parents, and guidance counselors. In spite of all the measures put in place by various successive government to check the menace of unemployment, the situation has rather heightened. Such measures like: National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) by Chief (Gen) Olusegun Obasanjo and Federal Ministry of Youth Development (FMYD) by late President Umaru Musa

Yar'adau have achieved little or no solution to the problem. All duplicated the work of National Directorate of Employment without making any headway in the issue at stake.

A graduate according to Hornby (2006) is a person who has a university degree especially the first degree from a university or college. On the other hand, Business Dictionary (2014) defined unemployment as the number of able men and women of working age seeking paid work.

Graduate unemployment therefore refers to the number of graduates without job in an area or country. Unemployment is afflicting the large army of graduates coming out from various institutions of higher learning. These graduates are likely to face some challenges and are forced into a difficult situation as a result of this and their means of livelihood can no longer be sustained.

In the face of difficulties, some of the unemployed graduates might map out strategies to cope with their situation. These strategies can be referred to as coping strategies.

A recent report on "Global Employment Trend for Youth" revealed that in the last decade the number of unemployed youths has tremendously risen by 15% from 74 million thereby leaving one third of the world's young people without jobs. The report further pointed out that the rate of youth unemployment in developing countries is likely to be three times more than the older adults. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) (2006, p.1), the global unemployment rate for young people in 2005 was 13.5% compared to 4.5% adults. Iroanusi (2006) views the crises of youth unemployment as a global phenomenon.

The Nigerian universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other higher learning and professional institutions turn out graduates from various disciplines every year, the labour market has become over flooded that it can hardly absorb the teeming population. Omotosho, Idowu, Esere and Arewah (2009, p.1) posit: "Nigeria's capacity to employ its own population seems to diminish progressively despite the country's quantifiable fiscal ability resulting from production and sales of oil." Only a few of the graduates can today boast of being gainfully employed. Worse still, many professionals even appear not to be skilled enough to be self-employed so as to be fully absorbed and well integrated into the society as they have been severally spotted queuing up en-mass for interview of few positions in various firms.

The lamentable state of unemployment and the undue economic hardship on graduates according to Nwala (2010) have given rise to alternative culture and redefined the state and country's value system. This is evident in the number of young graduates, increasing those hawking, soliciting and begging in the streets of Rivers State. From observation, some have become glorified bus drivers, bus conductors or even tricycle (Keke Napeep) riders to keep life going. On the other hand, many seem to have also resorted to unwholesome ventures such as armed robbery, political tuggery, advanced fee fraud (419), and youth restiveness. This wastage of human resources has some reducing effects psychologically and socially as Eiaouad (2008) reported.

The unemployed are significantly more likely to suffer anxiety, depression, hostility, paranoia, loss of confidence, reduction in self-esteem, loss of motivation, learned helplessness, suicidal ideation, lower levels of coping and behavioural problems due to the bad idea and dark future.

Self-concept in simple terms is a psychological construct which deals with the way an individual views himself or herself. The self-concept of the unemployed may be endangered due to unemployment. Psychologists have established that work has psychological dimension. It is an essential source of identity and provides people with a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. This

self-worth or esteem, as the case may be gives them a feeling of mastery and self-fulfillment when they engage in work activities. Zunker (1994) opines that unemployed people often experience feeling of low self-esteem resulting from their not being involved in job activities. In other words, work has a tremendous function which is of great importance to both individuals and the society.

Anxiety has been defined by Davidoff (1981, p.263) as “emotion characterized by feelings of anticipated danger, tension and distress and by arousal of the sympathetic nervous system”. According to Nwankwo (2013) it is an emotion just like sadness or happiness and is characterized by feelings that unfavourable or dangerous circumstances are imminent. This makes the individual become tensed up, troubled and distressed. Anxiety is common in our daily activities but when it is high and persistent it becomes a problem. It can be of different levels low, medium or high. High level of anxiety can be debilitating. Graduate unemployment may elicit high level of anxiety.

Graduate unemployment as a major source of concern has adverse challenges on individuals, state and the national, economy. The researchers see graduate unemployment as a phenomenon which is capable of impeding progress in many ways. Apart from being an economic waste, the researchers view it as capable of constituting danger for political stability of the state because it takes a sound mind to maintain sustainable peace and progress. The affected individuals tend to look at themselves as second class citizens for not being able to make meaningful contribution to their family and the society of large.

This study therefore investigated some psychological challenges associated with graduate unemployment and their possible coping strategies in the face of economic hardship in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out the psychological challenges and coping strategies unemployed graduates employ to survive their economic challenges in Rivers State. Precisely the study achieved the following:

- Find out the extent self-concept constitutes a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.
- Find out the extent anxiety constitutes a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.
- Find out the coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

- To what extent does self-concept constitute a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates?
- To what extent does anxiety constitute a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates?
- What are the coping strategies employed by unemployed male and female graduates?

- To what extent do male and female unemployed graduates differ in their coping strategies?

Hypotheses

In this study, the following hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance were formulated to accomplish the purpose of the study:

- Self-concept is not a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.
- Anxiety is not a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.
- There is no significant difference in the coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study comprised of all the unemployed graduates resident in Rivers State. However, since it is difficult to define the number of unemployed graduates in Rivers State, the researchers used the number of those who turned up for the aborted immigration recruitment exercise on 15th March, 2014 at Liberation Stadium Elekahia, Rivers State. About 23,000 unemployed graduates were in attendance (information by the officer-in-charge of the centre for recruitment on ground).

The sample was 400 unemployed graduates, which was drawn through accidental sampling technique. Four research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. A 22 item structured questionnaire titled Psychological Assessment Scale (PAS) was used to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument was developed by the researchers using 4-point likert scale. The four point Likert scale was weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 point for strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree and disagree respectively. The instrument used has two sections in part B and was validated by three experts from the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was established through test-re-test method using 10 (ten) males and 10 (ten) females that were not part of the sample. The data generated from these two sets of scores from each section were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The value of 0.72 and 0.67 were obtained for the variables under study indicating that the instrument has high reliability.

The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation (\bar{x} and SD) while the null hypotheses were tested using independent t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. Any item with mean of 2.50 and above was accepted by unemployed graduates as a psychological challenge and coping strategy while any mean score below 2.50 was not regarded as a challenge and coping strategy to the unemployed graduates.

RESULTS

The results were presented with respect to the research questions and corresponding hypotheses stated in the study.

Research Question 1: To what extent does self-concept constitute a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates?

Hypothesis 1: Self-concept is not a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates

Table 1: T-test analysis of self-concept challenge to unemployed male and female graduates

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Result
Male	192	19.24	3.97	398	-8.08	1.96	Significant
Female	208	23.12	5.45				

* Significant level = 0.05

Table 1 shows mean scores of self-concept challenge to unemployed male and female graduates as 19.24 and 23.12 respectively. The two groups differ slightly in their mean rating of self-concept challenge in favour of female graduates.

Table 1 also reveals that at 0.05 alpha level and 398 degree of freedom, the t-calculated of -8.08 is greater than the t-critical of 1.96 to make for significance difference. Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, self-concept is a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.

Research Question 2: To what extent does anxiety constitute a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates?

Hypothesis 2: Anxiety is not a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.

Table 2a: Levels of Anxiety of male and female unemployed graduates

Level of Anxiety	Male	%	Female	%
High	14	9.7	40	15.6
Medium	50	34.7	96	37.5
Low	80	55.6	120	46.9
Total	144	100	256	100

Table 2a indicates the anxiety levels of male and female unemployed graduates. The high anxiety level of female unemployed graduates is more than that of their male counterparts.

Table 2b: T-test analysis of anxiety challenge to unemployed male and female graduates

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Result
Male	144	9.62	3.04	398	6.43	1.96	Significant
Female	256	11.46	2.12				

* Significant level = 0.05

Table 2b shows the mean scores of anxiety challenge to male and female graduates as 9.62 and 11.46 respectively. The two groups differ slightly in their mean rating of anxiety challenge in favour of female graduates. The table also indicates that at 0.05 alpha level and 398 degree of freedom, the t-calculated of 6.43 is greater than t-critical of 1.96 to make for significant

difference. Based on this the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore anxiety is a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates.

Research Question 3: What are the coping strategies employed by unemployed male and female graduates?

Table 3a: Mean analysis of the coping strategies of male unemployed graduates

S/N	Items: One copes with unemployment challenges by:	\bar{X}	S.D	Crit. \bar{X}	Remark
1.	Making oneself creative and likeable	1.95	1.1	2.5	Disagree
2.	Attending seminars and workshop to enhance skills and knowledge.	2.65	0.14		Agree
3.	Exaggerating one's socio-economic status to boost one's ego	2.15	1.92		Disagree
4.	Depending on charity for support	2.94	1.26		Agree
5.	Engaging in prostitution to get easy and quick money	1.72	1.36		Disagree
6.	Taking up transport business to raise finance	3.14	1.21		Agree
7.	Engaging in sports and recreational activities	2.93	1.71		Agree
8.	Engaging in petty trading	2.52	1.36		Agree
9.	Engaging in hawking business	2.16	0.98		Disagree
10.	Doing menial jobs to tackle some financial needs	2.94	0.92		Agree
11.	Farming to raise money for family upkeep	1.87	1.11		Disagree
12.	Living with relatives to survive	1.81	1.71		Disagree

From the data analysis in table 3a above showing mean and standard deviation of the coping strategies of male unemployed graduates, it was discovered that male unemployed graduates in a bid to cope with their present state agreed that they attend seminars and workshops to boost their skills, depend on charity, take up various transport business, engage in sports, engage in petty trading as well as doing menial jobs as a way of coping with their challenges.

On the other hand, male unemployed graduates show a low mean coping on making themselves creative and likeable, exaggerating their socioeconomic status; prostitution, engaging in hawking business, farming as well as living with their relatives to survive. That means they do not significantly serve as coping strategies to the male unemployed graduates.

Table 3b: Mean analysis of the coping strategies of female unemployed graduates

S/N	Items: One copes with unemployment challenges by:	\bar{X}	S.D	Crit. \bar{X}	Remark
1.	Making oneself creative and likeable	2.1	1.1	2.5	Disagree
2.	Attending seminars and workshop to enhance skills and knowledge.	1.95	0.38		Disagree
3.	Exaggerating one's socio-economic status to boost one's ego	2.64	1.63		Agree
4.	Depending on charity for support	2.5	1.78		Agree
5.	Engaging in prostitution to get easy and quick money	2.49	1.46		Disagree
6.	Taking up transport business to raise finance	2.4	1.38		Disagree
7.	Engaging in sports and recreational activities	2.5	0.89		Agree
8.	Engaging in petty trading	2.5	0.89		Agree
9.	Engaging in hawking business	2.48	2.1		Disagree
10.	Doing menial jobs to tackle some financial needs	2.5	0.89		Agree
11.	Farming to raise money for family upkeep	1.92	1.58		Disagree
12.	Living with relatives to survive	2.78	1.4		Agree

Also from the analysis in table 3b, female unemployed graduates cope with unemployment by exaggerating their socioeconomic status, depending on charity, engaging in sport and recreational activities, engaging in petty trading, doing menial jobs as well as living with relatives to survive.

On the contrary, female unemployed graduate do not adopt the following as coping strategies, making them likeable, attending seminars and workshops, engaging in prostitution, taking up transport business, engaging in hawking as well as farming to raise money for their upkeep.

Research Question 4: To what extent does male and female unemployed graduates differ in their coping strategies?

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates.

Table 4: t-test analysis of coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Result
Male	192	11.55	2.21	398	9.70	1.96	Significant
Female	208	9.41	2.19				

* Significant level = 0.05

Table 5 reveals the mean scores of coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates as 11.55 and 9.41 respectively. The two groups differ slightly in their mean rating of coping strategies employed in favour of male graduates. The table also indicates that at 0.05 alpha level and 398 degree of freedom, the t-calculated of 9.70 is greater than the t-critical of 1.96 to make for significant difference. Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates.

DISCUSSION

The result of the finding in table 1 indicates a male mean score of 19.24 and a female mean score of 23.12. When subjected to t-test analysis, a t-calculated value of -8.08 was realized leading to the conclusion that self-concept is a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates. This result however means that unemployed male and female graduates develop low self-concept as a result of their unemployed state. The result also indicated that the mean score of female unemployed graduates is higher compared to their male counterparts. The result of this findings is however surprising because unemployed males tends to experience low self-concept more than their female counterparts. On the other hand, they also tend to exhibit positive self-concept as a means of coping with their unemployed state.

On the contrary, Uzor (2007) carried out a study on psychological factors affecting unemployed graduates in Rivers State. He reported that there is no positive relationship between unemployment and self-concept of individuals.

The result on anxiety as a challenge to unemployed male and female graduates indicates that the mean scores of the two groups differ slightly in favour of the female unemployed graduates. The finding also indicates calculated value of 6.43 against the critical value of 1.96.

This leads to the conclusion that anxiety is a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates. The female unemployed graduates mean score (11.46) being higher than that of their male counterparts (9.62) is surprising. One expects the mean score of the males to be higher bearing in mind the enormous responsibilities (such as establishing a family, building a house and taking care of their relations) facing the male unemployed graduates.

The present finding is in support of Carl Rogers (1998) who indicated that any experience one has that is inconsistent with his/her self-esteem, including his perceptions of his/her own behavior evokes threat and anxiety.

If there is a significant degree of incongruence between self and experience, and the experiences are forcefully enough, the defenses used to deny and distort reality may collapse, resulting in extreme anxiety and a temporary disorganization of the self-concept.

According to Brown (1998) people with a poor self-image are more prone to psychological problems like anxiety, depression, physical illness, poor social relationship and underachievement.

From the male and female coping strategies analysed tables, it was revealed that the male seems to attend seminars and workshops to enhance their skills and knowledge, depend on charity for support, take up transport business, engage in sports, engage in petty trading and doing menial jobs to meet up some financial needs while the females tend to exaggerate their socio-economic status to boost their egos, depend on charity, engage in sports, engage in petty trading, doing menial jobs and living with relatives to survive unemployment challenges.

Furthermore, table 4 reveals mean scores of coping strategies employed by male and female unemployed graduates as 11.55 and 9.41 respectively. At 0.05 level of significance and 398 degree of freedom, t-calculated value of 9.70 was realized. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate accepted. Meaning that there is a significant difference in the coping strategies adopted by male and female unemployed graduates.

This result from the mean scores however means that the strategies male employ to cope with unemployment differs and is greater than that of their female counterparts. It means that the male tends to adopt several means as a way of coping. This means or strategies however may be positive or negative.

The result of this study is not surprising to the researchers because, they are aware that unemployed graduates in a bid to cope with their challenges engage in one form of activity or the other. The reports of Okoro (2006), Uzor (2007) as well as Volkolnen and Matikeinen (1992) also revealed however that unemployed graduates tend to involve themselves in various activities in order to adjust with their present state.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the paper revealed that unemployment challenges especially low self-concept is more a challenge to the females than their male counterparts. Anxiety is a significant challenge to unemployed male and female graduates. There is also a significant difference in the coping strategies adopted by male and female unemployed graduates. The researchers conclude that unemployment constitutes serious psychological challenges to unemployed graduates in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Vocational guidance counselors should be posted to schools and made functional at all levels to enhance proper orientation of the students before entering the labour market.
- Counselling centres should be made available in each local government of the state to enable guidance counselors organize seminars and workshops for youths even at the village levels to help the unemployed find their feet.
- Parents-teachers association should be made more functional to discuss and give feedback on the emotional development of students.

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